

Bridging tradition and tomorrow: Imagining the future of the Sri Lankan community Imam

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The Imam, a central figure in Islamic communities worldwide, holds a particularly significant and nuanced position within the diverse socio-religious landscape of Sri Lanka. Far from being solely a prayer leader, the community Imam in Sri Lanka often serves as a spiritual guide, educator, social arbiter, and community developer. The major objective of the study is to comprehensively analyze the diverse roles and propose recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness and impact of Imams in contemporary society. The qualitative approach, relying on a synthesis of existing knowledge, observations, and an understanding of the socio-religious dynamics within Sri Lanka, was employed to address the research objectives. The analysis reveals that the community Imam in society performs a critical array of functions, often serving as the fundamental principle of community life. The following recommendations are proposed to establish a recognised institution to enhance the vital role of community Imams in Sri Lanka and maximize their positive impact on (a) Continuous professional development, (b) Formal recognition and support, (c) Empowerment in interfaith initiatives, (d) Integration with social services, (e) Youth engagement strategies, (f) Resource mobilisation and transparency and (g) Digital literacy and outreach. By recognizing their multifaceted contributions and providing them with enhanced training, resources, and support, Sri Lankan Muslim society can further empower these vital leaders to continue playing their crucial role in building resilient, harmonious, and progressive communities.

Keywords: *Community Imam, Empowerment, Leader, Society, Sri Lanka*